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ABSTRACT

Whereas female elementary principals represent only about 31 percent of the elementary principals in the nation, female teachers represent 88 percent of all elementary school teachers. This document reviews the literature on male-female differences in the leadership and management roles of the elementary principalship. (Author/MLF)

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CAN WOMEN FUNCTION AS SUCCESSFULLY AS MEN IN THE ROLE OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL?

by
G. Mickish

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Research Reports in Educational Administration

Next Issue: In the Area of School Finance: Sales, Income, and Property Tax Base Relationships Between and Among the 63 Counties.
By Frank Farner and John Edmundsen.

RESEARCH REPORTS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

The Editor's Comment

Female elementary principals represent only about 31% of the elementary principals in the nation. Yet, female teachers represent 88% of all elementary school teachers. Why?

Ginny Mickish looks to research to find if there is a body of research findings which support the notion that socially and psychologically men can perform better the leadership and management roles of the elementary principalship. Her report of these findings ought to be of interest to all of us concerned with the recruitment, selection, and training of elementary principals.

Mrs. Mickish is a reading consultant for the Boulder Valley Public Schools. She holds an MA degree from the University of Colorado and is currently working on an advanced degree. She belongs to numerous professional organizations and has been active as a leader, speaker, and writer primarily in the field of reading. A soon to be released article, "Prescriptive Helps for Eye Movement Difficulties," will be published by Educational Development Laboratories, Inc. (1971).

Mrs. Mickish's scholarly article on the elementary principalship was brought to our attention by Russell Meyers, Assistant Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Colorado.

Sincerely,

Jim Rose

James Rose, Editor
Research Reports in Educational
Administration

Can Women Function As Successfully As Men In the Role of Elementary Principal?

Currently, men constitute only twelve per cent of elementary school teachers. And yet, they account for sixty-nine per cent of elementary school principalships (Hoyle, 1969, p. 23). Paralleling the above, a national survey disclosed that 75.2% of all principals in our country are men (National Education Association, 1967, p. 62). Moreover, there is an increasing trend toward boards of education favoring the choice of men over women for the position of elementary principal (Grieder, 1969, p. 1042). This poses the question: are well qualified female candidates being bypassed in favor of males who are less qualified?

Anthony Milanovich (1966, pp. 18-19), a professor of education and a former elementary principal, queried hundreds of graduate students on the issue of female principals versus male principals. Similar to many board of education members and superintendents, an overwhelming majority of these students indicated a preference for men principals. Reasons given were:

> Most of the students questioned described male principals as being more democratic, more sympathetic,

> more understanding, more pleasant, more congenial, more relaxed, and more personally interested in their teachers. They further claimed that the men are not as critical, allow more freedom to teachers, do not supervise as much, do not get excited as easily, and can be approached and influenced more easily. An equal number of students pictured women principals as being too autocratic, too demanding, too critical, too particular, too moody, too emotional, and too "nosy." Moreover, they criticized the women for giving too much concern to petty matters, for supervising too much and for being too deeply involved in their work (pp. 18-19).

Are the afore mentioned statements true? Can the grounds for preferring men to women be justified? In this writing, the writer will make an attempt to show that there is little truth to the feelings of those who are responsible for the steadily diminishing number of women principals.

Are Men More Democratic?

Milanovich's students felt that male principals are more democratic and women principals were described as being too autocratic (Milvanovich, 1966, pp. 18-19). What does research say about these opinions?

The University of Florida College of Education was given a grant by the Kellogg Foundation to study leadership of the public school principal. The method used to sort out the principals who were successful was based on

frequency of use of democratic practice. The principals were classified as relatively democratic and using few authoritarian techniques or as relatively authoritarian and using democratic behavior less frequently. Grobman and Hines (1956, pp. 5-16) state that women principals ranked significantly ahead of men as democratic leaders.

A checklist of fifty-five key situations which school principals frequently encounter was used in the Grobman and Wiles (1955, pp. 75-77) study. The types of principals identified were: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. As in the previously mentioned study, it was again found that the women ranked significantly ahead of men as democratic principals.

Are Men More Sympathetic and Understanding?

Another criticism of women principals was that they are less sympathetic and understanding then men in that position. However, Hoyle and Randall (1967, pp. 28-33) report that women principals are probably more sensitive to the problems of other women and have more sympathy for the female point of view. They comment that since the majority, eighty-eight per cent (Hoyle, 1969, p. 23), of elementary school teachers are women, perhaps women principals are more sympathetic and understanding than men when dealing with most teachers.

In addition, women principals usually have spent more years teaching in the elementary school than men before they became principals. Gross and Trask (1964, p. 13-3) found that only three per cent of the women principals in their study had never taught in the elementary school while in comparison, thirty-four per cent of the men principals had never taught in the elementary school. Hoyle and Randall (1967, pp. 28-33) also found that approximately sixty-seven per cent of the male principals had less than six years of elementary classroom experience before accepting a principalship. On the other hand, eighty-eight per cent of the female principals became principals after six or more years of elementary school teaching. Since women principals as a whole have worked longer as elementary teachers, this tends to support that they have better understanding and are more sympathetic to the problems and situations that face teachers.

Are Men More Relaxed?

Milanovich's (1966, pp. 18-19) graduate students contended that men principals are more relaxed. It was felt that women principals are too emotional. Gross and Trask (1964, pp. 7-1--7-11) included the variable "worry"

in their study. When one considers the stress that faces the elementary school principal in terms of _in loco parentis_, emotional handicaps, learning difficulties in students, welfare and rights of teachers, and complaints and demands of parents, it can be understood why worry was included as a part of the study. It was found that the rank order of frequency of worry was highly similar between men and women principals. The areas of great and little worry were approximately the same. In essence, this study found that both men and women principals worry--to approximately the same extent.

Are Men More Personally Interested in Their Teachers?

Gross and Trask (1964, pp. 10-1--10-22) undertook to find whether men principals differ from women in the social distance that they maintain between themselves and their elementary teachers. Results of the study indicated that there was little difference in social distance _in_ the school. Both men and women want teachers to show respect for their position, occasionally ate lunch with their teachers, and wanted teachers to treat them as "one of the gang" at informal gatherings. The only difference of _in_ school social distance was that men principals were less likely to encourage teachers to call them by their first name.

Probably due to the mores of society, there was a difference in social distance outside the school. Gross and Trask found that female principals associated more frequently with their teachers out of school than did their male counterparts. The writer feels that this contact with teachers outside of school is an indication of sincere personal interest and tends to counter the statement that men are more personally interested in their teachers.

Men Are Not As Critical, Moody, Or Demanding?

The inference that women principals are more critical, moody, and demanding than men would lead one to believe that teachers, pupils, and parents would prefer to associate with men in that position. However, the limited evidence that we have suggests just the opposite. McIntyre (1965, p. 43) contends that the women-teachers-won't-work-with-a-woman-principal argument is a myth and has never been substantiated. Hoyle (1969, p. 23) states that a group of teachers in a survey rated female and male principals equal in ability and personal qualities. Moreover, women teachers preferred women principals oftener than men teachers did. However, male teachers who had taught in schools administered by women were more favorable to women principals than to men. The only men who disapproved of women

principals were those who had taught only under male principals.

Hoyle (1969, p. 23) found that women principals were also frequently favored by parent and pupils. He writes that women work better with outsiders and encourage pupil participation more than men principals.

Do Men Allow More Freedom To Teachers?

As is written above (Grobman & Hines, 1956; Grobman & Wiles, 1955), it was found that women are more democratic than men principals in terms of the way they work with teachers and, in addition, with pupils and parents. This would indicate that perhaps women allow more freedom to pupils and parents as well as to teachers. Grobman and Hines (1956, pp. 9-10) found that in the democratically administered school, teacher satisfaction with human relationships on the job was higher, teachers were involved to greater extent and used a wider variety of procedures to produce change.

With regard to pupils and parents, pupil attitudes favored the democratically administered school. Parents also responded favorably to democratic principals and a higher degree of parental participation was secured by

relatively democratic principals (except with parents whose incomes were under $2,000 or had only a grade school education).

Men Do Not Supervise As Much?

Milanovich (1966, p. 19) contends that perhaps his students are correct. A problem with many male principals is that they are too permissive and are not providing enough valuable direction and help to teachers. Most school board rules and regulations require that teachers be supervised by the principal and/or central office supervisors (Gross & Trask, 1964, p. 8-1). Gross and Trask (1964, p. 13-4) found that women derived more satisfaction from supervising instruction but in their study there was no sex difference in the importance attributed to supervision.

Moreover, the writer feels that women principals are perhaps better equipped to give good supervisory help to teachers because of their college or university training. In addition to more classroom teaching experience, they have generally had more education classes. Better knowledge of techniques and methods is of great importance in providing good help for teachers. Gross and Trask

(1964, p. 2-32) found that women principals had more undergraduate education courses than men. Twice as many women as men had sixty hours of education. Moreover, women were generally better students than men. At the graduate level, men took more administrative education courses than women. Gross and Trask (1964, p. 2-32) concluded that the men were preparing for further advancement in school administration.

Can Men Be Approached and Influenced More Easily?

In their study of the democratic behavior of principals, Grobman and Hines (1956, p. 10) found that women principals had a more favorable attitude toward curriculum change than men. This would indicate to the writer that women could, at least in some circumstances, be approached and influenced even more easily than men.

Are Men Less Concerned With Petty Matters?

Gross and Trask (1964, p. 13-4) examined the whole area of the influence of principals' sex on their reactions to and feelings about their work. With regard to petty matters, they found that men and women did not differ in the importance they attached to the management of routine

administrative duties or in the evaluation of their ability to do them. However, they found that men derived greater satisfaction from the performance of these duties than women did.

What Further Insights Can Be Gained From Research?

Hoyle and Randall (1967, pp. 28-33) conducted a study concerned with the problem solving aspects of principalships. They contend that the recognition of potential problems and the concomitant action taken on them greatly affect the quality of instructional programs. Results revealed that teachers described women principals as noticing potential problems and evaluating results of action significantly more often than male principals.

Grobman and Hines (1956, p. 14) report on a study aimed toward the layman rather than educators. The procedure for judging the behavior of principals was to determine how parents and pupils as well as teachers reacted to the principals. On the whole, schools with female principals tended to outrank those with male principals. Even when questioned about discipline, parents approved of women principals over men.

Hoyle (1969, p. 23) cites a study by Hemphill, Griffiths, and Frederiksen (1962) which has shown that

women principals are more concerned with the objectives of teaching and do a better job of evaluating learning.

In their chapter on education values and men and women principals, Gross and Trask (1964, pp. 5-1--5-22) asked principals to state the criteria they would use to evaluate a school much like their own. They were then to attach importance to the criteria in terms of no, little, some, or great importance. The following four items: "The school's concern with individual differences, the academic performance of its pupils, the proportion of pupils who seem delinquency-prone, and the school's ability to influence the social and emotional development of the child [pp. 5-2--5-3]" were chosen to reflect standards. Gross and Trask found that firstly, in all schools regardless of size, female principals "gave greater weight to the difference between individual pupils [p. 54]" than male principals. The one exception was in cities of one million or more. In that case the scores of men and women were approximately the same. The authors contend that women principals gave more stress to individual differences among pupils because they have more interest in and knowledge of pedagogical methods and techniques. Secondly, it was found that women and men principals did not differ in importance attributed to the academic performance of pupils as a basis

for judging a school. Thirdly, it was found that women principals were more concerned about conformity to middle-class standards and the social-emotional development of students than were men. And lastly, it was found that women did not place greater emphasis than men on a school's ability to maintain discipline. There was one exception. Women principals did give discipline greater emphasis in schools that had high socio-economic status.

Gross and Trask (1964, pp. 12-2--12-27) also included organizational performance in their study. They undertook to determine if the sex of the principal of a school has any effect upon teacher performance, morale, and pupil learning. Results from a measure of the responses of four to ten teacher-observers indicated that the performance of teachers was better under women superiors. The authors feel that this can be explained by the fact that women are teachers for a longer period before they become principals, have greater self confidence in their ability to direct instruction, and are more deeply committed to their positions. However, it was found that morale in a school was not associated with the sex of a principal. Lastly, and of great importance, it was found that student achievement was higher in schools administered by women principals. Grobman and Hines (1956, p. 14) corroborated

this by contending that pupil achievement in arithmetic, reading, and language was better in schools with women principals.

Men Or Women?

The inequity in elementary administration should be of concern to teachers, administrators, parents, and school board members. The criteria presently being used to employ principals does not appear to be directly related to success on the job (Grobman & Hines, 1956, p. 15). Research study after research study has exploded the beliefs expressed by Milanovich's (1966) students and those often expressed by board members and superintendents. However, sex has been a determining factor in the employment of principals with men very markedly preferred (Grobman & Hines, 1956, pp. 15-16). Today's society can flourish only if both women and men are encouraged to make full use of their individual skills and talents (Wood, 1968, p. 876).

The writer is not a "feminist." She does not suggest that the majority of principalships should be given to women. Rather, "it would seem that in light of accumulating evidence, boards of education and superintendents would do well to avoid discrimination on the basis of sex

and look instead for the personal qualities and administrative skills that are needed in the particular leadership job to be filled (Hoyle, 1969, p. 24)."

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